



1/025 Media and Communications

Objective

This Policy establishes clear protocols for the Town of Port Hedland's official communications.

It aims to ensure consistent, transparent and accurate information sharing that reflects the values, objectives and strategic priorities of the Town of Port Hedland.

Scope

This Policy applies to all employees, elected officials and contractors of the Town of Port Hedland involved in any form of public communication, including but not limited to media interactions, press releases, social media posts and public statements.

It encompasses all channels and platforms used to communicate on behalf of the local government and covers both proactive communications and responses to inquiries or issues.

Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- 1. Ensure consistency and professionalism.**
Establish protocols for the Town of Port Hedland's official communications to ensure the organisation is professionally and accurately represented in all public interactions.
- 2. Promote positive public perception.**
Enhance and maintain a positive public image of the Town of Port Hedland by delivering clear, consistent, and engaging messages that foster trust and confidence within the community.
- 3. Clarify roles and responsibilities.**
Clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Elected Members, and the Chief Executive Officer in speaking publicly or issuing statements on behalf of the Town. This clarity aims to ensure that all statements are aligned with the Town's values and strategic objectives.
- 4. Foster transparent communication.**
Promote open and transparent communication channels that encourage active engagement and participation from community members while respecting confidentiality and legal obligations.



Roles and Responsibilities

Speaking on behalf of the Town of Port Hedland

Mayor

The Mayor is the primary spokesperson for the Town of Port Hedland, representing the Town in official communications including speeches, public statements, and commentary across print, electronic, and social media platforms (Local Government Act 1995, s.2.8(1)(d)). The Mayor provides statements on policy, strategic issues, and community-wide matters.

Deputy Mayor

In the Mayor's absence, the Deputy Mayor is authorised to act as the spokesperson for the Town, fulfilling responsibilities for public commentary and representation as needed (Local Government Act 1995, s.2.9 and s.5.34).

Chief Executive Officer

The CEO may act as a spokesperson for operational matters if expressly authorised by the Mayor (Local Government Act 1995, s.5.41 (f)). This includes providing information on service delivery, administrative decisions, and internal Town operations. The CEO may delegate to subject matter experts at their discretion.

To respect the Office of Mayor, other members should refrain from public commentary on recent decisions or ongoing issues until the Mayor has provided an official statement.

Media enquiries

All media enquiries must be directed to the Public Affairs function as the first point of contact. The Manager Public Affairs is responsible for coordinating information to support the release of an official response, ensuring it aligns with the Town's communication standards and strategic priorities. This responsibility may be delegated to other members of the Public Affairs Team.

The Manager, or their delegate, will also determine the appropriate spokesperson (typically the Mayor, Deputy Mayor or CEO) based on the enquiry's content and relevance to their role.

Media relations

The Town of Port Hedland is committed to maintaining open and transparent communication with the media. The following guidelines will govern all interactions:

1. Open dialogue

The Town will engage in discussions with the media on matters of public interest, provided that such disclosures do not violate the Town's duty of care, contractual obligations, legal issues, or privacy laws that govern its operations or any individual's privacy rights.



2. Timely responses

Media enquiries will be dealt with promptly, honestly and within the organisation's deadline whenever feasible. The Town recognises the importance of timely communication in fostering a positive relationship with the media and the community.

3. Coordination through Public Affairs

All media enquiries must be directed to a member of the Public Affairs Team as the first point of contact. The Manager Public Affairs will coordinate responses and gather necessary information to facilitate the release of an official statement on behalf of the Town, ensuring alignment with the Town's communication standards and strategic priorities.

4. Designated spokespeople

Only designated individuals, such as the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, or CEO are authorised to comment on behalf of the Town on sensitive or high-impact issues, maintaining the integrity of the Town's message.

5. Confidentiality and sensitivity

All communications must consider confidentiality and the sensitivity of certain topics. Staff and elected officials should exercise discretion when discussing matters that may impact individual privacy or ongoing legal issues.

6. Training and support

The Town will provide training and resources to staff and elected officials on best practices for engaging with the media, ensuring effective and appropriate communication.

Public Communications and Social Media

The Town of Port Hedland recognises the importance of public communications and social media as vital tools for engaging with the community. To ensure effective and responsible use of these platforms, the following guidelines apply:

1. Official communications

All communications through social media and public online platforms must adhere to the Town's standards for professionalism, accuracy, and transparency. Only designated representatives are authorised to post official communications on behalf of the Town.

2. Use of personal accounts

Elected Members and staff are encouraged to use their personal social media accounts responsibly. When doing so, they should clarify that opinions expressed are their own and do not represent the views of the Town. Official communication should always be conducted through authorised Town channels.

3. Content moderation

The Town reserves the right to moderate its official social media accounts and may address or remove content that is deemed:

- racist, sexist or discriminatory content, links or images.



- violent, obscene, profane, insulting, hateful, derogatory or illegal content, links or images.
- threatening or defaming content directed at any person or organisation.
- solicitations, advertisements, or endorsements of any financial, commercial, private businesses or organisations.
- multiple successive off-topic posts by a single user.
- repetitive posts copied and pasted or duplicated by single or multiple users.
- offensive, inaccurate, false, misleading or deceptive comments or content.
- material which infringes third party intellectual property rights.
- any other inappropriate content or comments as determined at the Town of Port Hedland's absolute discretion.
- abusive comments about elected members or Town of Port Hedland employees

4. Prohibited activities

Social media and unsecured online forums must not be used to conduct official Town business, hold meetings or make decision. Communications must avoid any content that could damage the reputation of the Town or contravene legal obligations.

5. Compliance with Codes and Regulations

All public communications, including social media interactions, must comply with the Town of Port Hedland's Code of Conduct and the Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

The Town will monitor its social media channels to assess engagement and public sentiment. This evaluation will help inform future communications strategies and improve interactions with the community.

Crisis Communication

The Town of Port Hedland is committed to effective communication during crises or emergency situations. This section outlines the procedures and guidelines to ensure timely, accurate, and coordinated communication in such instances.

1. Crisis Communication Plan

A comprehensive Crisis Communication Plan will be developed and maintained by the Manager Public Affairs. This plan will outline roles, responsibilities, and procedures for communicating during emergencies, ensuring a structured and efficient response.

2. Designated crisis communication team

A designated crisis communication team will be formed in the event of an emergency or crisis. This may be an extension of the Town's Emergency Response Team, or separate depending on the nature of the event. This team, led by the Manager Public Affairs, will be responsible for implementing the Crisis Communication Plan and may include the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, CEO and relevant department heads.



3. Timely and accurate information

In a crisis, timely and accurate information dissemination is crucial. The Crisis Communication Team will ensure that information is verified and communicated swiftly to minimise misinformation and public concern.

4. Official statements

Official statements during a crisis will be issued by designated spokespersons, primarily the Mayor or CEO, to maintain consistency and authority in messaging.

Publishing third-party information

The Town may publish, or refer to, information from third-party sources. This section outlines the procedures to ensure third-party information is verified or, where this is not possible, audiences are made aware that it may be from unverified sources.

1. Commitment to accuracy

The Town will make every effort to verify information before publication and will promptly correct any misinformation identified in its communications.

2. Publishing unverified information

Where information comes from a source which cannot be typically verified as credible, the below disclaimer will be published:

Disclaimer: The information provided herein is intended for general informational purposes only and may not reflect the latest developments, verified facts, or complete accuracy. While we strive to share reliable information, some details may be based on unverified sources subject to interpretation. We encourage readers to verify information with credible sources and exercise caution when using or sharing this information.

3. Definition of credible sources¹

Sources that can typically be defined as credible are information providers that meet the following criteria:

- **Authority:** The source is recognised as an expert in its field, typically possessing relevant qualifications, experience or credentials.
- **Accuracy:** The information provided is supported by evidence, fact-checked, and aligns with established knowledge or data.
- **Objectivity:** The source presents information in an unbiased manner, free from conflicts of interest or personal agendas.
- **Reputation:** The source has a history of reliability and is respected by peers and the wider community for its integrity and commitment to truth.
- **Transparency:** The source provides clear citations, references, or links to the original data, enabling verification by the reader.

¹ The definition has been developed from a range of academic advice.



Conduct of Elected Members

When communicating – whether in an official capacity or personally – Elected Members must ensure that their communications:

- Do not bring the Town of Port Hedland into disrepute;
- Do not compromise their effectiveness in their roles;
- Avoid any implication that personal views are endorsed by the Town; and
- Protect confidential information, ensuring no unauthorised disclosures.

Elected Members’ public statements and social media activities must adhere to the Town of Port Hedland’s Code of Conduct and the Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007.

Supporting Guidelines

This policy's implementation is supported through relevant internal operating procedures and the Town's Code of Conduct.

Definitions

“Media” refers to methods of communication with media outlets such as media releases, media responses, interviews, photo opportunities.

“Social Media” refers to web-based technology which facilitates the communication and sharing of text, photos, audio, video and information in general.

“Employee” refers to permanent, part time, casual or contracted Council Officer.

<i>Relevant legislation</i>	<i>Local Government Act 1995</i>
<i>Delegated authority</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Business unit</i>	<i>Corporate Affairs</i>
<i>Directorate (choose one)</i>	<i>Office of the CEO</i>

<i>Governance to complete this section</i>			
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